

Supervisor FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



Can you recommend a quick conflict resolution strategy that supervisors can use? Is there such a “formula” – an A, B, C approach? Then, if that doesn’t work, we can refer to the EAP.



How do I correct an employee’s bad attitude?

Answers



There are thousands of books on conflict resolution, each with variations on the subject. This shows the difficulty in a cookie-cutter approach. However, where conflict resolution between two employees exists, changing the dynamic to elicit more cooperation between warring parties can help speed a resolution; for example, insistence by management that the conflict be resolved and having participants face some sort of penalty or consequence for failure to do so. Instantly the dynamic is one of cooperation, with the conflict itself, not the other party’s perceived unreasonable demands, the bigger problem.

If your organization is interested in using a mediator to resolve an ongoing conflict within the workplace, statewide mediation services are available. [Click here](#) to find out more.



Consulting with the EAP would be a positive first step in figuring out how to handle the issue. The next step is “Tell me more.” All supervisors will complain about an employee with a bad attitude at some point in their career. Typically, the description entails a negative and cynical communication style, disagreeable nature, suspicious view of management’s motives, or someone whose statements consistently undermine morale. Attitude problems require the best documentation because these employees are often smart people with plenty of logic in their presentation style. Moreover, nearly all employees with bad attitudes have something valuable to say about needed change, so it is often a mistake to see them as entirely unreasonable malcontents. A supervisory consult with the EAP is recommended to develop a change strategy, and this will usually include teasing out any legitimate complaints.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I often see references to the importance of “being yourself,” “being authentic,” and “being a real person” as a skill for supervisors. What does that actually mean? Does it mean being a certain way or making sure that you do not act in a certain way?



We planned to fire an employee on Monday, but he entered a drug treatment program over the weekend. We were informed by a few of his coworkers. Should we get the EAP involved? How? We can't reach the employee. Perhaps it isn't necessary at this point.



My employee has no job issues, but I am fearful of his return to absenteeism problems and angry mood swings everyone was seeing two weeks ago. Is it too late to make a supervisor referral to the EAP? Also, this same pattern happened about six months ago.

Answers



Being yourself, being genuine, being “real,” not pretending to be perfect, or learning how to be more available emotionally to employees all refer to the same thing: “authentic leadership.” This is a dynamic in supervision, the goal of which is to increase productivity of workers by establishing optimal relationships with them. The idea is to be professional but at the same time to balance this with approachability, friendliness, and openness. The opposite of this is a supervisor who is physically and/or emotionally remote, detached, and appears unapproachable to his or her employees. This balance is a learned skill. Supervisors vary widely in their ability to do it. Being authentic is not just being nonthreatening to employees. It is being purposeful so that employees can feel open in talking with their supervisor so that their strengths and weaknesses, personality, and working style can be better understood. This in turn allows the supervisor to help an employee maximize his or her potential. This improved relationship with the supervisor facilitates the workers also putting forth more effort.



There is much the EAP can do, but it cannot approach your employee to request he or she participate in the program. EAP can assist your employee in follow-up, advocate for services after discharge, and monitor continuation and participation in whatever post-discharge treatment plan is recommended, and do long-term follow-up. All these services can help reduce the likelihood of relapse.



Formally referring an employee to EAP is based on work performance issues. If you anticipate that problems will return then consider consulting with the EAP. What you say and how you say it are also important, so consider discussing with the EAP an effective delivery. The EA professional can also help you identify additional key points to include in your constructive confrontation. A referral to EAP is important because serious personal issues may underlie this type of behavior-performance pattern.